

SIGN-ON LETTER

for Law Enforcement Officials

We are current or former members of the law enforcement community. As prosecutors, judges, police officials, and correctional staff, we have shown a commitment to keeping our state safe. It is because of this commitment that we cannot support the death penalty and instead call for its repeal. Though we hold varying views on the death penalty – some of us support it in principle, others do not – we all agree that in practice the death penalty fails the people of Colorado. Our state has the opportunity to take an important step toward smarter, more effective law enforcement by ending capital punishment.

The death penalty is ineffective as a law enforcement tool. There is no evidence that the death penalty deters murder. In a Hart Research poll, police chiefs ranked the death penalty as the least effective tool for reducing violent crime. The experience in New Jersey and other states without the death penalty has shown that the death penalty is unnecessary for obtaining plea bargains. There, prosecutors reported no obstacles in obtaining severe sentences after the death penalty’s repeal.

The death penalty wastes valuable resources that could go toward effective crime-fighting measures. Because of the additional resources and preparation required in death penalty cases, the separate sentencing phase, post-conviction appeals, and the added costs of incarceration, studies consistently find the death penalty to be more costly than life in prison without release. In Colorado, taxpayers pay millions a year to keep the death penalty. That money could go toward evidence-based crime reduction programs.

The death penalty puts innocent lives at risk of execution. As is the case with any human institution, mistakes occur in the criminal justice system. Since 1973, over 140 individuals in the United States have been exonerated from death row. The recent DNA exoneration of Tim Masters for murder show the fallibility of Colorado’s justice system. Before waiting for a fatal mistake to take place, our state should abolish the death penalty now.

The death penalty can inflict severe trauma on those charged to carry it out. It is impossible to justify placing correctional staff in the trying and stressful position of administering an execution, given the available alternative of life without release.

We urge our elected officials to seriously consider these concerns that the death penalty raises for law enforcement officials. Violent crime is a serious problem demanding serious solutions. Far from a solution, the death penalty is an empty symbol that results in waste, delay, and pain. We as a state deserve better.

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